



# The South India CHURCHMAN

The magazine of the Church of South India

● December, 1997



For to  
us a  
child is  
born,  
to us a  
Son is  
given..."

(Is.9:6;)





## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

December 1997

The Shepherds did not go to Bethlehem seeking the birth of a great man, or a famous teacher, or a national hero. They were promised a saviour.

*(H.H. Brown)*

Verbally in Scripture, visually in sacrament, Jesus Christ is set forth as the only Saviour of sinners.

*(John R.W. Stott)*

Christmas is a cosmic celebration of the beginning of something which we cannot adequately describe: it is a liturgy that sings of the new covenant between the God of eternity and man in history.

*(Pope Paul VI)*

And all this, that our hunger might be fed, our dryness moistened, our weakness comforted, our iniquity quenched, our charity kindled! What greater mercy, than that the Creator should become a creature, the Sovereign become a servant, the redeemer be sold, the Exalter be abased, the Life-giver be slain?

*(St. Augustine of Hippo)*

By His divine nature, Christ is simple. By His human nature, He is complex.

*(St. Thomas Aquinas)*

He is what God means by man;  
He is what man means by God.

*(J.S. Whale)*

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## THE SOUTH INDIA CHURCHMAN

*The Magazine of the Church of South India*

December 1997

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The merry season of Christmas is once again here. A sticker in a car that passed me by on the road attracted my attention. It read "The wise still seek Him." My thoughts turned to that beautiful and fascinating story of the Magi narrated by Matthew in his Gospel. Four things are to be noted in this lovely episode. First, in all probability these wisemen who came from afar were not Jews. Secondly, they travelled long distances and faced many difficulties in order to come and see the one 'who is born the King of the Jews.' Thirdly, we are told that on seeing him they rejoiced, worshipped him and gave him gifts and fourthly we are also told that after seeing him they took a different route and went their ways. The Gospel of St. John says "He came into his own world and His own knew Him not." What a tragic thing would it be if we who call ourselves christians fail to seek him and find him in this season and everyday of our lives. Like the Magi are we prepared to traverse and meet all kinds of hardships and challenges to seek and find him who is the truth, the light and the life? And if we have met him in our lives this season has it filled us with joy and a willingness to worship him and give him gifts? We are told Herod the great and all Jerusalem with him were troubled when

they came to know about his arrival. Do we rejoice? The Magi gave him perhaps the most valuable things they possessed! Are we prepared to present to this king the most valuable thing we possess? We are told that after seeing him they took a different route. Usually that is what happens when people encounter Jesus in their lives. They change and take a different

### A VIEW FROM THE PEW

route. St. Paul comes to our mind. He also met him and his life totally changed and from then on he took a different route; so St. Augustine and so did countless other christians and as a result they found joy, light, truth and life abundant. Are you prepared to take a different route now from the one you have been pursuing all these days?

☆☆☆

The Synod session, by God's grace, is taking place at Arogyavaram from January 13-17, 1998. It is going to be a momentous session in the history of the CSI for various reasons. As the General Secretary, Prof. George Koshy mentions in his report, it is a Golden Jubilee session and the last to be held in this century. The next will be in the 3rd millennium. Many important things are on the agenda. This synod will discuss the constitutional amendments

and give its approval. It is a good thing that at last these amendments will eliminate some of the lacunae that proved to be administrative bottlenecks in the past. We need to seek God's guidance in whatever we do and beseech the Lord of the Church to fill us all with his spirit that the synod may be guided by him into all truth. There is also another all too human side to the synod, the elections. But unfortunately some of us tend to give it more importance than it deserves. In any democratic polity election offers an opportunity for people to choose their leaders. But we should be careful not to make election the be all and the end all of the church's life. In the last synod a young delegate was seen walking out with his suitcase in his hands the second day and when someone asked him where he was going, he said he was going to a town 100 kilometers away to attend to some personal matter since his work was over at the synod with the election! Isn't it time that we changed all this? Electoral reforms are also long over due and the synod should also give some thought to evolving a code of conduct, norms to be followed and adhered to in election procedures, campaigning etc in the larger interest of the church. We commit the synod 1998 into his hands for his protection, mercy and guidance.

☆☆☆



# MISSION CONGRESS - 1997

held at United Theological College, Bangalore 14-16 August, 1997

## MESSAGE TO THE CHURCHES

The Mission Congress - 1997 organised by the WCC, NCCI, CSI, CUI and SCMI met in commemoration of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of India's Independence and the inauguration of the CSI, in the United Theological College, Bangalore from 14th to 16th August 1997. It was a special occasion to become nostalgic about the sincere contribution of the Christians all over India in the freedom struggle.

After three days of deliberations and discussions on various aspects of concerns, the Mission Congress proposed to send out this message to all our Churches in India.

We are grateful to God Almighty for enabling the Church to be in a contributive co-existence with the life and development of our independent India for the past fifty years. On behalf of thirty million Christians of India we greet our Nation with all our solidarity and support for the development of the marginalised masses and improving systems as we are entering the next phase of our Nation and the third millennium of the World.

The Church in India while it feels proud of her contribution to nation building in terms of her ministries like Education, Health, and multifaceted philanthropic activities, she also realises the growing challenges like:

*Social sensitivity of her ministries*

*Dalit issues*

*Lack of women participation*

*Christian care for the victims of AIDS, rapes, riots, and other disasters*

*Church Union, integration and right forms of being Salt to the World in active programmes of the congregation*

*Workable paradigms of ministry in the pluralistic context and also the growing problem of church litigations.*

However the Mission Congress came alive to the fact that the Churches have not been adequately sensitive to the challenges for the past fifty years.

We ask God to grant unto us a new vision of our meaningful participation with the humanising forces and help us to be a corrective, loving, and caring community of faith with commitment to one another beyond all barriers.

The Mission Congress also affirms that our churches through all its administration, leadership and ministries uphold the Christian values to make an effective witness of Christ's love and forgiveness.

The christian institutions of all kinds will profess through their life and work.

- *a high code of human dignity*
- *a note of mutual benefit*
- *a spirit of corporate wellbeing.*
- *a sense of responsibility.*
- *a freedom of outreach,*
- *a beauty of working together,*
- *and so share Christ's love with all.*

The leadership of the Church shall promote.

- \* *Sharing responsibilities*
- \* *being transparent in fiscal matters,*
- \* *identifying and organising talents of all,*
- \* *shift from authoritarianism to democratic values,*
- \* *mitigation of power politics which involves money and oppression,*
- \* *and spirit of care and concern with impartiality.*

The Mission Congress expressed its great hope and optimism that all our congregations would reflect the mission of the Church as a blessing to others always planning, executing and evaluating the progress with mutual respect and cooperation.

The Church and our Nation in the coming year greatly hope to meet the needs and aspirations of the poor and the oppressed mobilising the resources with Christian integrity to spread the Kingdom values all over our communities in India.

### Recommendations :

The mission of the Church is to participate in God's mission in the world -- a mission expressed as community - building -- 'villages without walls' (Zechariah 2:4), where life is shared in all its abundance with others (John 10:10). To equip the congregations to become such communities that are rooted and empowered by Christ and are open to all God's people, is the purpose of mission and ministry.

(Cont. on Page 16)



# CHRISTMAS IS GIVING AND RECEIVING

— A message from Canterbury

One of my all time favourite Christmas stories is Charles Dicken's *Christmas Carol*. You will know it so well that it is hardly necessary to repeat the story. It is a real heart-tugger as the selfish, old skinflint scrooge is shown how so much of humanity lives with suffering and discovers the joy of sharing his wealth. It would be a mistake, however, to see it only as Scrooge learning to give. The story is also about him learning to receive. I don't believe, you see, that Scrooge was totally bad. He believed in hard work and he had many disappointments in earlier life. But over the years he became hardened to the struggles of others and indifferent to their needs. As he withdrew from others he failed to see that he was shrinking inside and that his capacity to love, which is the essence of humanity, was dying. He lost the ability to see the beauty of others and the joy of receiving love from others. Surely, there cannot be a more perfect ending to a story than when Scrooge is moved to mark Christmas by meeting the needs of Bob Cratchett's family and Tiny Tim in particular. As he gives, so he receives in seeing the obvious delight of that unfortunate family.

We too know the pleasure of giving at Christmas. How we rejoice as we see the gratitude of our family and friends as they open the presents we give them. It doesn't have to be much to give real pleasure to people. 'It is the thought that counts' we often say and it is true. Giving is a truly ennobling thing and speaks of the character of God himself in his total and unconditional love for Creation.

God's gift of Christ is, of course, central to all our Christmas celebrations. How God, too, rejoices as he sees his precious gift of love chang-

ing us. The challenge of Christmas for us, as we seek to respond to God's gift, is whether we are able to receive him afresh, to allow ourselves to be open to the promptings of the Spirit, rather than turning in on ourselves and closing off from God in a Scrooge-like defensiveness and selfishness.

The gifts which will be brought to the Lambeth Conference next year will be many and diverse. We all bring something from our own experience, our own journey of discipleship, and that of the churches in which we serve, which will enrich the conference. All of us have stories to tell. It is one of the greatest privileges of my ministry, as I travel round the Communion each year, to see and hear those stories in action, whether in Australia, Jerusalem or Pakistan. The days are long gone when our gathering was dominated by the 'richer' provinces lecturing and giving to the 'poorer'. The richness of the ministry and mission of the Anglican Communion today can be seen in every single province. Certainly, some places may be richer in the materialistic sense of the world, but the riches of faith, joy and vitality that are winning so many new soul for Christ today are not controlled by money. Many of us can only sit back in admiration at the stories of church growth in so many places where material poverty is so rife. The Gospel, faithfully preached and lived, transcends such human divisions, and we must learn that message.

I have a 'dream' for Lambeth 1998 that I want to share with you. My dream is that our gathering in Canterbury will be truly infused by faith and joy and vitality; that the true spirit of Christmas, of God's giving and our receiving of the gift

of Jesus Christ, will transfigure the Conference, so that whatever tensions and divisions we have to face, our life of discipleship and witness will be strengthened by the experience of being, talking and worshipping together.

I hope that every bishop and his or her spouse will come prepared to give, to share their story. Some will bring gifts of mission, liturgy, faith learned through persecution and suffering, scholarship, leadership and pastoral oversight. I have no doubt that we shall all be truly blessed by the huge range of gifts which we will bring.

But part of my dream is also of each person coming to receive - to receive from the insights and giftedness of others, to hear the stories which others have to tell, to enter into the extraordinary and unique experiences which have moulded each of us on our path of discipleship. It will be shameful if people come simply with their own agendas to 'force' others to accept their point of view. That's not true giving; that's dictatorship. The Conference will only be a success if we come in a spirit of humility, eager to embrace one another as fellow disciples and pilgrims.

We shall all be on trial next year as the world around us watches to see if we are prepared to put our own interests second to the primary task of sharing the Gospel and building the common life of our Communion. Among the criteria that others shall judge us by will be:

\* Our willingness to receive and learn from those bishops whose churches are growing, so that we may become a truly missionary Communion, developing confidence in mission and evangelism.

\* Our commitment to dynamic Christian social action and ministry



to the marginalised and needy people of our world, who themselves have so much to teach us.

\* Our willingness as leaders to recognize the brokenness of our world, to embrace the diversity of humanity and to search constantly for what binds us together inspite of our different cultures, languages and backgrounds.

\* Our willingness as leaders to accept sacrifice as a precondition of leadership and to serve our people whole-heartedly, looking always to Christ as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.'

I have to confess that there is a 'Scrooge' in me that wants to protect all that I hold dear, to defend myself from the insights and challenges of even my companions in faith. Equally, however, I hope the 'Christ' in me is constantly challenging this instinct, prompting me to listen to what they have to teach me and to receive and surrender to their wisdom. I hope he prompts us all to offer ourselves in willing surrender to others.

As we approach the Lambeth Conference 1998 we should recall that the Anglican Communion itself is a precious gift to the rest of the Christian world. And as we learn to give so our Lord will help us to receive.

As an English bishop wrote not so long ago, 'No Christian preaches the Gospel on the basis of being a good advertisement for it, but only on the basis of being totally dependent on the love and power of God to take him or her forward.'

Perhaps Christina Rossetti's poem puts it ever better.

'What can I give him poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb,

If I were a wise man I would do my part,

Yet what I can I give him,  
Give my heart.'

Eileen joins me in wishing each of you, our dear friends, a most happy and joyful Christmas and a Happy New Year..

George Cantua  
Archbishop of Canterbury

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# AN ECUMENICAL CONSULTATION ON INTER-RELIGIOUS PRAYER

J RUSSELL CHANDRAN \*

## Introduction

When the Golden Jubilee of the Church of South India was being celebrated at Madras I was away in Italy participating in a Consultation on Inter-religious Prayer, jointly sponsored by the Office of Inter-religious Relations of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue of the Vatican. Because of the financial crisis faced by the WCC at present the number of participants at seminars, conferences and consultations called by the WCC has been limited. Accordingly, the present Consultation also was a small one, only fourteen members, seven representing the Pontifical Council and seven representing the World Council of Churches. The participants were all competent theologians, churchmen and scholars from different parts of the world. The theme for the Consultation was **Inter-religious Prayer - A Theological Evaluation.**

## Venue

The venue for the Consultation was the centre of a unique monastic community, known as the *Comunita di Bose*, in which monks and nuns live together in monastic discipline. The town of Bose is located at about 100 kms. from Turin, the biggest city in Northern Italy.. The monastery is described as "a young ecumenical mixed community, a community searching for God in prayer, poverty, celibacy and obedience to the Gospel". It has its beginnings in 1963 when a group of catholic, Waldensian and Baptist students met for Bible study. One of them, Enzo Bianchi, a student of Economics, decided to start a monastic community. For a few years he was alone, but in 1968 a young

Swiss Reformed pastor and two young Roman catholic women asked to be admitted to the monastic Community. Slowly more men and women joined and now they number about 50, thirty men and twenty women. Only two of them are ordained priests of the Roman Catholic Church, and they take care of the sacramental needs of the community.

## The common life of the Monastery

They gather for prayer, worship and meditation three times a day, at dawn, mid-day and evening. Beautiful music characterises their singing and chanting of the Psalms. They are in plain clothes for their worship, except for the weekly celebration of the liturgy, for which they wear a full white habit, the sisters covering their heads with a white hood. It is a self reliant community, the members taking care of all the task taking turns. Apart from the tasks in the monastery the members are involved in different occupations; two of them are well qualified medical doctors serving in a nearby hospital, one is a psychotherapist, one works in the Olivetti company, and others are teachers, librarians, carpenters, typists, ceramists, agricultural workers, pharmacists etc. The incomes from the different jobs are pooled for their common life together.

A special character of this community is their hospitality. Any person coming to the gate of the monastery and rings the bell is warmly received by one of the monks and made to feel welcome. Almost every day individuals and groups come to visit and share their problems with members of the community. Some come to join in

the worship services. Others come for different celebrations such as birthdays, anniversaries and the like. When we were there one couple came for thanksgiving on their 30th wedding anniversary and the monastery provided a special wedding cake for them.

The Consultation participants joined the community for the mid-day and evening worship. Even though the worship was all in Italian it was a refreshing experience to enjoy the music and share their spirituality.

## The Consultation

The Consultation was held from the evening of 25th September to mid-day on the 29th September, 1997. The context of the Consultation was the plurality of religious faiths in the different regions of the world and the phenomena of a growing number of communities practising inter-religious prayer. To begin with religious plurality led people of different religions to reflect on the significance of religious diversity. This was followed by a desire to meet at a deeper level, sharing one another's religious life and spirituality. This desire resulted in the practice of inter-religious prayer.

The office on Inter-religious Relations (OIRR) of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) decided in 1994 to examine the question of interreligions worship and prayer. A Consultation was held at the Ecumenical Christian Centre at Whitefield, Bangalore, in 1996, with participants from a variety of Christian traditions and from different parts of the world, sharing their experiences of interreligious wor-

\* Former Principal of UTC, Bangalore.



ship, prayer and meditation. It was a sequel to this meeting and based on its recommendations that the present Consultation was arranged. It was jointly chaired by Bishop Michael Fitzgerald, the Secretary of the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue and Dr. Hans Ucko, the WCC Secretary for Interreligious Relations.

The question was how we theologically understand and interpret inter-religious worship and prayer. To guide the discussions there were scholarly presentations by different participants on the Biblical perspectives, theological considerations and pastoral implications.

Reflecting on the Biblical insights the Consultation affirmed that interreligious prayer is one way to practise love towards our neighbours and to strive with them in a common quest for a more peaceful and just world. While we find a fundamentally open approach to prayer in the different religious traditions there is also warning against idolatry which harms human dignity.

Theologically, it was also affirmed that prayer is multifaceted, taking many forms, embracing joyful expression as well as agonised lamentation. "Prayer is preceded by the speech of God...A Christian understanding of prayer begins with the particular prayers of Jesus, especially the Lord's Prayer". "Prayer together is an invitation to friendship, to share the reality of loving God who is our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer". Two models of interreligious prayer were identified, the *responsive* model and the *hospitality* model. Responsive interreligious prayer is the "outward facing" prayer in response to situations of human need and the impulse of the Spirit. The hospitality model refers to occasions wherein one takes on the role either of host or guest.

With regard to pastoral concerns it was stated that in our common journey in search for truth we should be open to challenge each other in the spirit of mutual trust and enrichment. While recognising the

interconnectedness of our life of prayer in the encounter with people of different faiths it was affirmed that our participation in inter-religious prayer does not negate our commitment to proclaim the Christ event.

A warning was also sounded against the danger of reducing prayer to the lowest common denominator and of losing the distinctive richness of each tradition. The Consultation stated, "In this reductionist approach the particular is sacrificed for the sake of general harmony. As communities grow together in confidence they may become readier to accept that more use be made of prayers and symbolic actions typical of the respective faith traditions".

The concluding affirmation was, "As prayer transforms our life, so interreligious prayer should have a positive impact upon the life and relationship in our communities. As we move into deeper encounters in interreligious prayer, we might experience it as a journey, realising that prayer in itself is open-ended, a sign of eschatological openness".

## Mainstream churches meet to discuss responses to sects

### HUNGARY

Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant church representatives met in Hungary in the last week of September to discuss how to respond to the challenge of evangelical sects. "The historic churches have acknowledged they have to face this problem and clarify the meaning of religious liberty," said retired Calvinist Bishop Karoly Toth, president of Budapest's Ecumenical studies Centre, which organised the five - day meeting. "They are worried about the great number of new movements, especially those which are hardly known," he said.

The bishop was speaking after the "Conference on Religious Freedom and New Religious Movements" in

Hungary attended by about 80 Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant church members from 16 European countries. Archbishop Istvan Seregely of Eger, Hungary was a participant. Representatives of the conference of European Churches also attended the conference in Hungary. Bishop Toth said the conference's Vatican and WCC sponsors had not invited representatives of the sects, although they were not "against movements in principle." "The historic churches have to contribute to this process of distinguishing between socially dangerous new religious movements and those working to society's benefit."

Bishop Toth said "although it is very difficult to answer the question, 'Should all registered religions be equal?'" pressure for tighter regulations on religious groups has grown in Eastern and Central Europe over the past two years.

The chief spokesman for the Hungarian bishops, Plarist Fr Laszlo Lukacs, said that atleast 30 groups had gained full church rights since 1989, and an attempt to raise the main registration requirement from 100 to 10,000 signature had failed in parliament. "Protestant churches feel the dangers even more than Catholics, since the sects attract followers from traditional churches," he said.



# AN ECUMENICAL JUBILEE: WHAT IT MIGHT MEAN FOR THE CHURCHES

KONRAD RAISER\*

## Introduction

It has been suggested that in opening up a reflection among the member churches of the WCC about the Eighth Assembly in 1998 and its theme, I might focus on the motif of an "Ecumenical Jubilee" and what it might mean for the churches. As you know, the Central Committee of the WCC has confirmed by postal vote that the theme of the Eighth Assembly should be: **"Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope"**. This formulation, which had already been considered seriously at the last Central Committee meeting in Johannesburg in January of 1994, was finally retained over against a number of other possible formulations because it seemed to express most adequately the biblical motif of the jubilee which had been accepted earlier as the focus for preparing the assembly.

The Eighth Assembly of the WCC in Harare will indeed be a "jubilee-assembly" taking place fifty years after the first assembly in Amsterdam in 1948. In common English usage "jubilee" refers to a special anniversary and carries with it the connotation of joyful celebration. Surely, the 50th anniversary of the WCC should also be an occasion for joyful celebration, but the reference to the biblical jubilee motif goes far beyond this everyday meaning. It so happens that the constitution of the World Council of Churches suggests that assemblies should be held normally in intervals of seven years. The Eighth Assembly will therefore come after "seven weeks of years" corresponding directly to the biblical stipulations for the Jubilee Year in Lev.25. Further

exploration of this initial analogy has indeed provided important inspiration for approaching the event of the Eighth Assembly. The theme: "Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope" is proposed not so much as an affirmation for study and reflection, but as an evocative indication of a direction and as a source of inspiration for daily Bible studies as well as for the liturgical and spiritual life of the assembly. It is the intention on the Assembly Planning Committee that the Jubilee motif should provide the framework for planning and shaping the content of the assembly.

Since these decisions of the governing bodies of the WCC, Pope John Paul II has issued an Apostolic Letter to the bishops, clergy and lay faithful of the Roman Catholic Church "On Preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000" (see Tertio Millennio Adveniente, Vatican Press 1994). The second chapter of this letter (9-16) develops the concept of the jubilee with reference to the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Christ. The biblical explication of the jubilee offered by the Pope shows the rich meaning of the motif in the biblical tradition which is then being translated into the outline of an impressive process of spiritual and liturgical preparation for the year 2000. In fact, since the year 1300, the Roman Catholic Church has begun to reappropriate the biblical tradition of the jubilee year as an occasion for a general remission of debts which in the medieval church became the occasion for special indulgences. Since the late 15th century, the Catholic Church

has been celebrating every twenty-five years as a "Holy Year" of which the last was celebrated in 1975 with the main focus on reconciliation. Following this tradition, the year 2000 is to be celebrated as a special Holy Year i.e., 'the Great Jubilee'. The holding of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council in 1998, only two years from the end of the millennium, and the parallel focus of the jubilee gives added significance to our question: An Ecumenical Jubilee - what might it mean for the churches?

## Biblical Reminders

What is therefore the background and the meaning of this biblical notion? The central point of reference is the 25th chapter of the book of Leviticus where the 50th year to follow on seven sabbath years is being called a "*jobel*" year (Lev.25:10). The meaning of the Hebrew word "*jobel*" which has been rendered in the Latin translation of the Bible as *Jubileus* is unclear. What we learn from chapter 25 in the book of Leviticus is that the jubilee year shall be opened on the day of atonement by the sound of the trumpet and that the opening of this year shall be a proclamation of "liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family" (Lev.25:10). The day of atonement (Lev. 23:27ff) where Israel is to clean itself of all sins, is to be followed five days later by the festival of booths (Lev. 23:34ff) which is the traditional harvest festival of Israel. The central stipula-

\* The Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, Geneva.



tion that in the jubilee year everyone shall return to their property is combined further with the intentions of the sabbath year, i.e. there is to be no sowing or harvesting so that the land can enjoy a complete rest (v.11). No land in fact shall be sold in perpetuity, for "the land is mine" (v.23) and all ownership is only that of a tenant or trustee. The jubilee year and the sabbath year belong to the same tradition. Leviticus 25 is part of the Holiness code (Lev. 17-26) which is one of the three collections of ancient Jewish legislation - the book of Covenant (Ex. 20-23) and Deuteronomy. The Covenant code is the oldest of these collections reflecting the situation of an egalitarian community of free peasants. Deuteronomy comes 200-300 years later reflecting the social development under the monarchy, i.e. the emergence of a money economy, of class differentiation and taxation. The Holiness code dates probably from the exilic period after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The sabbath year occurs in all three collections (Ex. 23:10ff, Deut. 15:1 ff, and Lev. 25:1ff) but is reinterpreted in the light of changing conditions. The basic notion of the sabbath tradition is a regular period of rest for the land, the animals and the servants (Hebrew *shabat* = to cease, to rest). In the context of Deuteronomy, this basic notion is extended and reinforced by the idea of "remission" with regard to debts and slaves (the Hebrew words *shemitta* and *samat* mean to withdraw the hand, to let loose, or to liberate). This new interpretation is a response to the distortion of social relationships through an imbalance of power and an accumulation of wealth. The sabbath year is intended to restore just relationships in society.

Under again radically changed conditions, Leviticus 25 has taken up the same tradition. Here the remission of debts and the release of slaves is demanded only every

fifty years, an unrealistically long period. The main focus now is placed on the restitution of the original distribution of land property for all families. We have no direct evidence that the jubilee year was actually observed, even though there is some evidence that the programme of reconstruction under Nehemiah followed the jubilee principle (Nehemiah 5:1-13). This could suggest that the concept of the jubilee year merged at the end of the exile in Babylon in the situation of an impending return of the exiles. The time from the destruction of Jerusalem to the edict of Cyrus announcing the possibility of return was approximately fifty years. The jubilee year, therefore, expresses the vision of a new beginning, a return to the order of community life instituted by the will of God. This is underlined by the fact that the jubilee year is to be proclaimed on the day of the atonement.

The intention of the biblical jubilee was to break periodically the inevitable historical dynamic of acquisitiveness and domination leading to exclusion, and to restore the opportunities for life in community to all. Already in the prophetic tradition (Isaiah 61:1-2 and Ezekiel 46:17) the jubilee had become a symbol of salvation. As such, it was reappropriated by Jesus who used the sabbath and the jubilee tradition as a concrete representation of the coming kingdom of God, extending its promise beyond the Jewish people to those considered outside the covenant. In his first sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19), Jesus proclaims liberty in quoting Isaiah 61 leading to the affirmation: "Today this word of Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). The specific sabbath rule of the cancellation of debts, which already in Leviticus 25 is integrated into the jubilee framework, is reflected in the Lord's prayer (Matt. 6:12) which thus becomes a jubilee prayer: Forgive us our debts as we forgive

those who are indebted to us (the Greek word for the act of forgiving is used to render the Hebrew found in Isaiah 61 to express the "release" of captives and prisoners). The parable of the unfaithful servant (Matt. 18:23 ff) indicates that in ancient society the failure to repay debts could lead to the loss of liberty. A further echo of the jubilee message is found in 2 Corinthians 6:2: "See, now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation" - which follows directly on the proclamation of reconciliation. Through this reappropriation of the jubilee traditions utopian legislation of Leviticus 25 was transformed into a powerful prophetic vision of the new life in community in the horizon of the kingdom of God. The periodicity of the sabbath and the jubilee year is radicalized in the eschatological now or today. Any moment can become the year of God's favour, the time of salvation. Now is the time for liberation, remission, forgiveness, reconciliation. It is God who offers the jubilee of healing and restoring life, of forgiveness and liberation from bondage. This is the "revolution" of the gospel which leads to a transformation of values and a genuine reconstruction of community.

### **Some Echoes of the Biblical Jubilee Motif in the Church and Beyond**

The tradition of the biblical jubilee has inspired new reappropriation in the course of history. The early patristic theology reinterpreted the sabbath by celebrating Sunday as the day of the resurrection of Christ and the beginning of the new creation. The period of fifty days or weeks, i.e. the jubilee period, led up to the feast of Pentecost seven weeks after Easter, celebrating the outpouring of the Spirit and the birth of the church. Pentecost is thus the fulfilment of the celebration of new life which was inaugurated at Easter. The fifty



days of celebration following Easter have to be taken together with the fifty days of repentance during the Lenten period preceding Easter. They form the full liturgical context in which the Orthodox Church until today relives the ancient biblical jubilee.

In the introduction, I have already referred to the new reception of the jubilee tradition by the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages. While the celebration of holy years was initially closely linked to the notion of indulgence, the emphasis has more recently moved to spiritual renewal in the love of God, faithfulness to the gospel, reconciliation and commitment to justice and compassion in human society. Very often the jubilee or holy years have been occasions to affirm Roman Catholic integrity, notably in the year 1959 with the promulgation of the most recent mariological dogma and the encyclical *Humani Generis*.

A more direct reappropriation of the Old Testament motif of the jubilee is visible in sermons and religious writings in the context of the 19th century struggle for the emancipation of slaves in the United States. Several African-American spirituals from that period sing of a "year of jubilee". The proclamation of the emancipation of slaves in 1863 was interpreted as the beginning of a year of jubilee. In this context it might be important to note that the liberty bell in Philadelphia, one of the great symbols of the American revolution, carries the inscription quoting from Leviticus 25:10: "Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants".

Following the same line, the Old Testament jubilee motif has been reappropriated most recently in reflections coming from the context of the historic peace churches. Here the radical imperative of the jubilee prescriptions, i.e. leaving the soil fallow, cancelling debts, freeing slaves and redistributing capital, have

been applied to the structures of injustice which characterize relationships within and between societies today. In particular the imperative to cancel debts has been used as a biblical reference in discussions about the global debts crisis.

A few examples of a contemporary reappropriation of the biblical jubilee tradition might be added. Thus the Korean churches have been celebrating a jubilee year in 1995, i.e. fifty years since the end of the Second World War and the division of the country. Their hope was that this year would inaugurate the process of the reunification of Korea and the reconstitution of national unity. The Swiss churches declared the year 1991, in which the anniversary of the establishment of the Swiss Confederation 700 years ago was being commemorated, a jubilee year of "Halljahr" and they appealed for a collection of 700 million Swiss francs to be used for the repayment of international debts which were being owed to Switzerland. Finally, there is an Asian-African initiative to mark 1998, the year of the WCC Assembly, a jubilee year to commemorate the five hundred years since Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape in Southern Africa to reach the Indian Ocean. This initiative calls for the cancellation of debts, for the restoration of land to the original owners and for the repatriation of what was taken away by the colonial powers.

These examples of reappropriating the biblical jubilee motif show the potential but also the limitations of a reference to Leviticus 25. Using the jubilee motif today could be understood as appealing to an utopian imperative and thus raising expectations which are unlikely to be fulfilled. Important as the social, economic and ecological aspects of the jubilee motif are, they must be linked in the preparatory reflection leading up to the WCC Assembly with the New Testament dimensions of forgiveness and reconciliation as

the way to the reconstitution of community. The basic thrust, however, in all these appropriations is the notion of an interruption of the flow of events, the initiation of a moratorium in order to redress, to reorient and to reconstitute. This could become the starting point for the thematic focus of the assembly. The 50th anniversary should be used as an occasion for the ecumenical movement, for the churches and for the WCC to reflect and to reassess its life. The aim of this moratorium would be to proclaim liberation and to practise reconciliation and forgiveness. The assembly could thus become the occasion for an act of manifesting the oneness of the Church of Christ, for the church is his and not ours.

### **An Ecumenical Jubilee - What Would It Mean Today?**

1. An ecumenical jubilee would mean to seize the anniversary year of the World Council of Churches as a *time under* God's promise, as a year of "*God's favour*". Earlier formulation of the assembly theme had tried to capture this sense of *Kairos* with the formulation "now is the time", which had already been used to structure the message from the Seoul Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in 1990. But the same emphasis on affirming God's favour is included in the invitation "Turn to God". This echoes the biblical invitation to *metanoia* (repentance), interrupting the flow of "business as usual" and affirming God as the source of life, of wholeness and of hope. Instead of the moralizing connotation of repentance, the turning to God suggests a change of allegiance, of liberation from other powers and captivities. This is not an invitation to return to God in the sense of going back, but to turn to the one who is always ahead of us with the promise of true life.

The invitation to "rejoice" emphasizes the anniversary year as an occasion for celebration and thanks-



giving. In the original Hebrew context, the joy of the jubilee was connected with the return from exile. It was the joy about the grace of a new beginning. In the Christian reception, inspired by Jesus himself, the jubilee becomes the parable for the joy of the kingdom of God, the beginning of a new creation. While there are reasons for joy about the achievements of the ecumenical movement, the invitation to "re-joyce" should always be seen in this wider context.

Finally, the assembly theme is intended to inspire hope. The constant reinterpretation and reappropriation of the original sabbath and jubilee year regulations carries the hope that the expectation of life in its fullness, of which the jubilee year is a symbol, can be fulfilled. Today in your hearing this message is fulfilled...now is the time. Christian hope is an expression of eschatological realism against the tendency of resignation and fatalism or the cynicism of power.

2. The jubilee signifies the return to the covenant order to God. All the key concepts begin with "re": *repetance*, *remission*, *restitution*, *reparation*, *restoration*, *regeneration*, *recreation*, *reconstruction*, *rebuilding*, *reconciliation*. However, this return (*metanoia*) is not a turning backward, but a reordering and reorientation which opens the way out of the house of bondage into the household of life. It is an invitation to return to the future, to be liberated from the bonds of the past and to embrace the promise of life. In a widely noted report, the French "Group des Dombes", an ecumenical study group in the tradition of Abbe Couturier of Lyon, has issued a call for the "conversion of the churches". This call is based on the conviction that the particular identities of the churches, marked as they are by the history of division, need to be transformed by a process of conversion, of turning to the common source of the churches'

identity, i.e. Jesus Christ. Already seventy years ago, the Stockholm Conference affirmed: "The closer we draw to Jesus Christ, the closer we come to one another". Conversion, therefore, means to be liberated from the bonds which tie the churches to their past and to turn to Christ who is always ahead of us, to follow Christ. The assembly could then become an occasion to spell out the call to Christian discipleship today.

3. The ecumenical jubilee is a call for the reordering of the life of the churches, for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation and for the restoration of communion. "The land is mine", we read in Lev. 25:23; "with me you are but aliens and tenants". This is being reinterpreted in the New Testament which invites us to be no longer aliens and strangers, but full members of God's household, the church. However, this household belongs to God and there are no exclusive property titles. An ecumenical jubilee - that would mean rendering the church, the ecumenical movement, back into the hands of God, cancelling all debts, all mutual condemnations and being released into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The continuing separation of the churches is deeply rooted in unconfessed and unforgiven sin and guilt. What separates the churches is not only doctrine and practice, but acquiescence in division and the defence of particular identities. Forgiveness, therefore, requires a reconciliation of memories, of active and common remembrance of the past. This could be extended to the liberation from the feelings of guilt connected with five hundred years of colonization and two hundred years of western missionary expansion. The confession of guilt and the acceptance of forgiveness and reconciliation is particularly relevant for the history of the 20th century which has both been the most destructive period in human

history and the time when the ecumenical calling of the church has been rediscovered.

The assembly could thus provide the framework for a ritual of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation - for an act of unity at the end of the millennium of division and Christian expansion. It could be a reaffirmation of the JPIC process leading up to a recovenanting of the churches.

4. Only churches which have responded themselves to the jubilee call and reordered their lives and their relationships accordingly can dare to issue the jubilee call toward the wider human community. The year 1998 will also be the culmination of the Ecumenical Decade "Churches in Solidarity with Women". The Decade has brought to the surface the widespread reality of violence against women in church and society. The Decade has thus become a test case for the readiness of the churches to respond to the call for the restoration of community in the one household of God.

Central to the biblical jubilee is the self-limitation of power exercised in terms of property and domination over slaves. The sabbath and the jubilee year call for a self-limitation in the exercise of power in order to restore a sustainable order of human community. Violence in any of its form is an expression of the uncontrolled excess of power which destroys relationships in human community. The reappropriation of the biblical jubilee motif, therefore, serves as a strong reinforcement of the ecumenical commitment to work towards the overcoming of violence.

5. The jubilee focus on the redistribution of land, i.e. of the basis of the sustenance of life, could sharpen our ecumenical reflection about a theology of life. The land, the earth, belongs to God who provides for our livelihood. All people are entitled to what they need. This



basic biblical affirmation finds expression in the imperative to redistribute the land, to cease productive activity and to give the land back to God from whom it was received. This symbolizes the restoration of the integrity of creation respecting the sanctity of life as a gift from God. An ecumenical jubilee would mean accepting a new form of life which reflects a deepened understanding of creation and of the place of humanity within God's creation. Already the Canberra Assembly had reflected about a new ethic of economy and ecology, insisting that the orientation towards growth and consumption had to be replaced by the values of sustainability and use. Since then, the insight has grown, not least in relation to the threat of accelerated climate change, that a profound social, political and spiritual reorientation is needed, a genuine paradigm shift. An ecumenical jubilee could become the moment of a firm common response of the churches to this challenge.

6. The announcement of the jubilee is placed in the framework of liturgy and worship. The jubilee is proclaimed through the sound of the trumpet on the day of atonement. The whole jubilee legislation can be interpreted as an example of the "liturgy after the liturgy". This

echoes the prophetic witness about true worship (Isaiah 58) which is being affirmed by Jesus in his teaching about the sabbath (Mark 2). The patristic tradition has interpreted the jubilee in the light of the resurrection and the outpouring of the spirit as the manifestation of the time of salvation, of the fullness of life offered by God. This could lead us to a new reflection about the inseparable relationship between worship and spirituality and the efforts to reconstruct human community.

The ecumenical jubilee of the year 1998 could thus find its continuation in preparing the churches for the year 2000 in the spirit of true worship, binding together spirituality and the commitment to restoring right relationships in human community. The assembly should lead to a solemn recommitment of the churches to a life which responds to the message of Jesus in his first sermon at Nazareth.

### Conclusion

We have begun to realize that the Eighth Assembly, the jubilee assembly of the WCC, will have to provide a fresh articulation of the ecumenical vision as we move into the 21st century. We are in the

midst of a process of transition and business cannot continue as usual. As we are searching for new paradigms and for a new vision which will inspire a new generation, the jubilee motif could serve as a crystallizing and integrating focus. It would thus not be a theme to be considered as such and to be spelt out in various issues for discussion at the assembly. Rather, it would serve as a matrix helping us to articulate the elements of a new ecumenical vision focusing on the reconstruction of viable human community and right relationships. Many times we have described and redefined the goal of the ecumenical movement. We have designed strategies only to discover that the goal had vanished into a more distant future. We are approaching the end of the second millennium, the period of Christian division, and the end of the century which has seen the emergence of the ecumenical movement. This is indeed a *kairos* and we should not lose the sense of expectancy and urgency. The Eighth Assembly of the WCC must be a time of liberation, opening the way for the ecumenical movement into the future of the 21st century. Thus it would truly become an ecumenical jubilee. ♦

## Christian philosophers discuss religion

### Uttar Pradesh

Forty - eight Christian philosophers but also including a few advanced students, met in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh from Oct. 7-11 for the annual meeting of the Association of Christian philosophers of India (ACPI). Seventeen research papers explored different aspects of the philosophy of religion from different perspectives, Indian and Western; philosophical, linguistic, mystical and psychological; contemporary and primeval.

The Varanasi meeting focussed on Philosophy of Religion. Papers such as 'the place of Religion in the Life of Modern Man,' 'The philosophical Background of Inter religious Conflicts and their Resolution,' were presented and discussed.

In the Varanasi meeting Fr Joe Mannath SDB (of Madras University) was re-elected President of ACPI. Fr Johnson Puthenpurackal, OFM Cap. of Vijnananilayam, Eluru was voted the Secretary in the place of Fr. Dominic Vas OCD, who had completed six years. Rr Vasant Ekka SFX of Pilar Niketan, Nagpur succeeds Fr. Thomas Maninezath CMI (of Dharmaram College, Bangalore) as treasurer.

The 1998 session will be held at Calcutta on October 21-24, 1998 and the subject will be Moral Philosophy (Ethics).

The ACPI brings together the philosophy professors of India's major seminaries and religious houses of

formation, as well as a few other qualified persons. Its annual meetings and publications have a triple aim 1. to maintain and improve the quality of our philosophy curriculum. 2. to assist professors of philosophy to widen and update their research and teaching; 3. to contextualise, challenge and lovingly critique what we teach and how we do it.

Another important fall-out of these meetings is the increased personal contact among professors who belong to different regions, religious orders or dioceses, and have been trained in different universities, different countries and different philosophical traditions.



# "LOVE AT CHRISTMAS"

USHA JESUDASAN

Everybody loves getting a gift. The thrill of opening a shiny package, the rustle of the paper, the first glimpse of what's inside, and the final glow, "It's what I've always wanted," all make gift giving and receiving a special activity. At Christmas, the giving of gifts is an important part of the celebrations. In Matthew's Gospel in the Bible, the account of Jesus' birth has recorded that three wise men following a star came looking for the infant king, and when they found him, fell on their knees and offered him their love, devotion and respect. Then opening their treasure chests, they gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The 8th century historian Bede the Venerable, in retelling this story depicted the first wise man as Melchior, white haired and bearded, bearing gold, the most precious of materials symbolising power. The second wise man, Caspar, chubby, beardless and young, brought frankincense, the costly gift fit for royalty symbolising holiness and priesthood. Balthasar, black, young and bushy bearded, the third wise man, offered myrrh, the most valuable of spices signifying suffering and death.

This was the time when the poor received an extra hamper of food or clothing. However, what once began as an expression of affection or a response to real need, has now escalated into an orgy of materialistic consumerism.

Everywhere we see bright lights and beckoning slogans. "This Christmas buy her a new fridge." "Buy him the suit in which he will feel a real man." "The newest bike, the latest computer, the prettiest sari, the zaniest toy."

Perhaps every age has this descent into meaningless giving. Most often we think of gifts as objects which can be exchanged. A sari for a sari, a jewel for a jewel, a toy for a toy. The costlier the object the more its value in the eyes of the receiver.

In the carol of the Drummer Boy, we find the little boy enviously watching those who bring the finest gifts for the baby Jesus. The only thing he has is his battered drum. He is sad that he has nothing better to offer. But then he realises that he has a gift, a gift for music and rhythm so he decides to play that for the baby Jesus. Listening to the beat of the drum the baby smiles, and watching the baby smile everybody

around also smiles. We tend to think of our talents and abilities as gifts that belong only to us, which we can nurture and express in a way that will bring us the most satisfaction.

The gifts which the three wise men brought to the baby's cradle, symbolise something that is at the heart of the Christmas message. That the gifts are not for that baby alone, but for the whole of mankind. Power, holiness, suffering and death belong not just to one person but to the whole of mankind. In a similar way, the drummer boy's carol shows us that our gifts are not to be kept only for ourselves, for our own use and enjoyment, but to be extended towards the whole community and shared, so that everyone may benefit from our talents, whether they be to organise, to create beauty, to teach, to heal or to do the simple things which make life easier for other people. This type of gift giving, lies at the heart of the Christmas message, that we are here not just for ourselves, but for each other, to have and to hold, for better for worse. We are to be givers of life for each other, not hoarders of wealth for ourselves. Like precious seed, our gifts truly flower and bear fruit only when it is sown into the ground of the community in which we live, so that they can nourish and satisfy not only us, but a larger group as well.

The Christmas season reminds us that in the midst of our making lists, shopping, and wrapping gifts, we need to stop and think of the gifts that really make a difference to people's lives. The gifts that don't cost much but which we can give generously to bring meaning to someone else. No matter what our age, the gift of kindness and sensitivity is one that is readily appreciated and treasured for life.

When I was seven years old, I had an operation on my leg which left terrible scars. It was Christmas time and my friends and cousins were excited at the thought of getting white "pointed toe shoes" as gifts. I had thick heavy shoes to protect my surgically corrected feet. They were big, brown and ugly, my scarred feet were ugly and I too felt ugly. On Christmas morning I woke up to find my toes painted a bright tomato red. Sometime during the night my grandfather had painted my toes and in the morning he said, "Ushamma, how

beautiful your feet look." And indeed they did look beautiful to me for I could no longer see the scars. An act of kindness and thoughtfulness changed a whole lifetime's sentence of ugly feet for a little girl. The gift of kindness or encouragement does not take much time or effort, but it goes a long way in lifting a hurting soul.

We live at a time of so much heartache and pain caused by strained or broken relationships. The gift of peace, whereby we can act as a peacemaker, being an instrument of peace in bringing angry people together or actively forgiving those who hurt us and restoring harmony into our frayed relationships is also a gift that money cannot buy. Christmas is a time when families torn apart by misunderstandings and quarrels can offer each other the gift of forgiveness and the chance to rebuild something more lasting and meaningful.

The gift of compassion, of understanding what someone else is going through, of caring enough to reach out and lend a hand, whether it be in kind or deed is something we all need in big measures. Add to it the gift of saying the right thing, of using our words to build and heal, and top it up finally with the gift of love.

Love is one ingredient our world never tires of, and of which there is never enough. Love is needed in palaces where royalty lives and in slums where the poorest sleep. In hospitals where the sick and dying lie, and in bureaucrats' offices where hard decisions are made. Love is needed by old men at the end of their lives and by little babies just beginning theirs, by beautiful young ladies and worn out old women. The gift of love is needed in every home and every heart.

When unwrapped what does love look like? It has hands that are ready to help others, it has feet that hasten to the call of the poor and needy. It has eyes to see the misery and want around. It has ears to hear the sorrows and sighs of those who are desperate. This is what love when it is unwrapped looks like. And love at Christmas is the greatest gift one person can give to another.

*Courtesy : The Hindu*



# "I BELIEVE IN FORGIVENESS OF SINS"

REV. G. DYVASIRVADAM\*

Almost all practising christians in our world, affirm the belief in forgiveness of sins atleast once a week; and the word "forgiveness" is repeated by us atleast once a day in our Lord's Prayer. The question is whether we attach any value or meaning to it when we confess the creed or say the Lord's Prayer or in the context of our life-situation.

## Forgiveness and Reconciliation

But Bible attaches paramount importance to these words. Forgiveness and reconciliation. We find these dual words go hand in hand; they are interchangeable. The Latin root *concilium* explains a bold process in which bi-polar groups/persons come together "in council" to workout their differing views towards achieving a common agreement. Ofcourse, it doesn't stop there but works deep in the consciousness. The notion of reconciliation suggests a process of healing and restoration. It is 'God' gift'.

"Forgiveness" is simply an act of pardoning at some one's repentance. "Repentance" and "forgiveness" are taken as the two sides of a process in which the perpetrator of an evil act confesses his/her remorse and the victim of that act grants pardon with generosity of mind.

The biblical image of these two words "Reconciliation" and "forgiveness" is so astonishing. "Reconciliation" occurs so sparingly. Only in Mt. 5:24 and I Cor. 7:11 is the term used for relations between people. In all other references the Greek noun *Katallage* and verb *Katallaso* are used exclusively for God's supreme act of conciliation with human kind, or the *Kosmos* to God's self. *Allassein* in Greek, means 'change'. This GK term brings a meaning of fundamental change, a complete renewal which divine providence alone can bring about. Therefore St. Paul under-

lines that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself... For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:19), Thus reconciliation becomes purely a divine act in his redeeming work.

The Greek word *aphesis* is used widely to indicate "forgiveness" in the Bible. The literal meaning of it, is 'release from bondage', the 'remission of debt, guilt or punishment'. But it is two way or an act which involves both the perpetrator and the victim. A healing takes place which lays a better path towards a new relationship between the conflicting partners. Forgiveness is a genuine process of encounter, of healing, of the releasing of new options for the future. Forgiveness frees the future from the haunting legacies of the past.

Christianity, although deeply grounded in and eternally indebted to the Jewish faith, has taken a markedly different turn. It is the central importance of Jesus as the Messiah that accounts for the paradigmatic shift from a religion of the law to a religion of love, to use Pauline categories. The Christian faith centres on the cross and resurrection of Jesus. In the life and death of this Jew, Christianity sees the Victim-God who offers unconditional forgiveness to all who will believe.

This soteriological shift is brought out most clearly in Jesus' prayer from the Cross "Father, forgive them; For they do not know what they are doing" (Lk.23:34). The victimised Son intercedes for the world to the victim-God, pleading for forgiveness; for we, the human race, do not know that our violence - our sin - is breaking the heart of God and tearing the world apart.

## Forgiveness - a tool of power-politics

Power and Authority are gifts of God. To use or misuse, is up to the authority. "Keys of the kingdom of heaven" were given to Peter not to lord it over the other disciples or the believing community. That authority was 'to follow' the crucified (Mt. 16:21) and to accept taking up his cross as a sign of their discipliship. (v.24). The power to bind and to loose, that is, the power to grant and to withhold forgiveness- is promised to those who are prepared to lose their lives for Christ's sake (v.25) and who do not try to "gain the whole world" (v.26).

The Reformers' agitation was not merely against the authority but exactly on the restoration of proper understanding of sin and the good news of forgiveness. They stressed on *sola gratia* (Grace alone) and the redeeming work of "Christ alone" (*solus Christus*) - Because of Christ (*Propter Christum*) forgiveness of sin is ours by "faith alone" (*sola fide*).

In the New Testament, while the vertical relationship between God and the believer continues, the horizontal relationship between humans and humans should be simultaneous in terms of forgiveness. That is why our Lord taught; "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us". Both are not separate but are two rhythmic processes of one indivisible act of "forgiveness".

But in the modern world, the powers-that-be pardon those who love them, who move around with them for small benefits; and when the powers-that-be want certain favours, a guilty can be easily forgiven! The betrayal of the original understanding of forgiveness has become "cheap grace" to use the term of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It is

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time, therefore, to reconstruct its life-giving and life-restoring value to the very divine act of "forgiveness"

### **Forgiveness as "I and Thou" :**

The famous existentialist philosopher Martin Buber wrote in his Book *I and Thou...* where ever there is a genuine encounter between persons something new emerges, an energy which neither possesses with in himself or herself or in isolation from the other, but which originates in their coming together (Tr. Ronalds Gregor Smith, 1937). Whenever two human beings reveal themselves to each other, an "energy-field" is established between them which transcends their individual strengths. In the religious and spiritual belief

this "energy" is referred to as God's spirit. It is the go-between factor leading to inexplorable experience of reconciliation. This experience opens the way for a liberation from the bondage of past hurts and wounds. It is here, forgiveness takes place and acts as pivotal force to see a new image of togetherness, thus making the whole process as "God-centred" relationship.

### **Forgiveness : A new challenge to the church :**

The courage to affirm oneself, inspite of the guilt thrown on us, we should have the courage of confidence. "It is rooted in the personal total and immediate certainty of divine forgiveness". This is what

Paul Tillich calls our "courage to be" (*The courage to be* 1952.).

The world is getting too small through communication. The courts of law have been receiving innumerable cases from the life of the church. One verdict given in a corner is carried to the other corner of the church either for selfish end or for justice that is not available with in the church. In the light of the growing number of legal matters, the Golden Jubilee Church in particular, and the church in general must recapture the understanding of "forgiveness" and "reconciliation" to live and witness in and outside the church towards 'christianizing the church'.

*(Continued from page 2)*

The order that we create in the Church should be an instrument for reaching this goal of community-building. For this, reason there is only one ministry; all people, clergy and laity together, participate in Christ's ministry/. Ordained Ministry is one; with the people they exercise different functions given to them by the Church.

We believe that exercise of power and decision-making processes should be transparent and mutually accountable, and that bishops and clergy should accept, as their primary responsibility, teaching and equipping the members of the congregations for their daily witness.

The Church's nurture programme should be empowering.

After four days of our consultation, we recommend to all the congregations and to the C.S.I. Synod the following recommendations for consideration and implementation:

(i) While we affirm the beauty of C.S.I. liturgy and its historical significance, we recommend that it should be revised, taking into consideration our commitment to gender equality, ecological concern and indigenous culture.

(ii) We recommend that programmes

of nurture for every local congregation - lay men and women, youth and children - should be carefully worked out and implemented so that it may become a community rooted in Christ and empowered by Him, participating fully in the Church's ministry and mission.

(iii) We demand equal participation of women and men in all committees and councils of C.S.I., and call for deeper commitment to women's struggle for freedom and dignity. Violence committed to women in all spheres of life should be condemned and severely punished.

(iv) We affirm a stronger commitment to the struggle of Dalits and tribals for their identity and justice. While we abhor casteism, we believe that we need to respond creatively to the struggles of the marginal groups for their identity.

(v) We ask the Synod to take all measure to ensure that the Diocesan constitutions comply with the basic framework of the C.S.I. Constitution, while making provision for legitimate autonomy for the mission in the local regions.

(vi) We strongly recommend that the tenure of the bishop be limited to ten years of service; and that they comply with the provisions in the C.S.I. Constitution regarding their responsibility for committees.

(vii) We recommend that the Abel Commission report be studied and its recommendations implemented.

Faith of Jesus is a faith that constantly beckons us to take up His Cross and follow Him; it is a faith that invites us to be in solidarity with all God's children, especially those who are broken and victimized; it should empower us to fight all forces that keep humanity divided. The Church is called to be witnessing community by its life and action. May the Holy Spirit empower us to be faithful to God's vision of unity. □

### **DIFFERENT VIEW POINTS**

Two men met on a mountain peak: 'I came here because I love adventure, and I have an insatiable curiosity,' said one, 'I like to see the Sunrise from new surroundings, and I like to tread where no man has trod before. I like to embrace the universe and admire the beauty of nature from the height and silence of mountain peaks. What about you?'

'I came because my daughter is learning to play the piano, and my wife is learning to sing'.



## THE PLIGHT OF CHRISTIAN DALITS

Christian Dalits suffer manifold miseries. Their plight is pathetic. They are victims of several factors. They suffer social degradation, economic disabilities and they are the victims of communal forces and politics. They are caught up between three forces, - a discriminating state, a caste and communally antagonistic society and a 'moralistic' and demanding church (p.14).

These are facts and are generally known to many in the society at large. But the need to establish the facts as proof through a systematic study was a felt need. The book under review meets that need.

The book presents a clear and cogent evidence of the deteriorating conditions of the christian dalits in the rural areas. It aims to help serve the christian dalits in their ongoing struggle for justice and also to awaken the church to fulfil its responsibilities towards these people. It proves that though the untouchables who were converted to christian faith were subject to the very same social degradations and economic disabilities, they were not included in the scheduled caste list and thus continue to be deprived of the protective discrimination guaranteed by the "Presidential Order" (SC 1950). It questions, with enough justification, the contention of the government that casteism is related to Hinduism and therefore the 'Untouchables' who were within the fold of that religion only were to be listed as scheduled castes and it also proves the point that government's failure to extend scheduled castes privileges to christians of 'Untouchable' origin was a serious discrimination on religious grounds in vio-

lation of Articles 14, 15 and 25 of the Indian Constitution - which guarantees freedom and justice for 'all' people.

This book is born out of the challenge posed by the Soosai Vs Union of India 1983 case. In spite of the petitioner's contention that he was Adi Dravida SC convert to christianity and that on his conversion to the christian faith, still continued to be a member of that caste and suffered from the same social and economic disabilities like the rest of the non-convert members of his community, the Supreme Court, however, dismissed the petition on the ground that he had not established his case by clear and cogent evidence. This empirical study was done primarily to secure clear and cogent evidences on the continued discrimination of christians of 'Untouchable' origin.

Thus, the first of the dual primary object of the study is to help in the struggle for justice of the christians of 'Untouchable' origin (p.15). The second is to create an awareness in the christian community with regard to the socio-economic discrimination and disabilities which the community in question suffers within the society, at the hands of the government and within the church. Thus it aims to wake up the church from its slumber and point to its responsibility towards those people who find it difficult to help themselves. (p.16)

This study was conducted in two districts of South India namely Bellary of Karnataka State and Kurnool of Andhra Pradesh, covering about forty four villages in those two regions. It is focused on

Christian Dalits in rural areas (p.17) and it covered respondents of the CSI within the Protestant Christian tradition (p.18). It brings to light the fact that 'Untouchability,' though lawfully punishable, is practised widely and that dalits suffer manifold social oppressions and multifaceted restrictions, compulsions, harassment - verbal abuse, physical assault, bonded labour, land grabbing, forcible eviction, molestation and rape of Christian Dalit women "committed out of sheer revenge."

It highlights the fact that it is the land owning Brahmins and the so-called higher castes, Seattis and others (Vaishya), who are harassing the christian dalits (p.55-59). It also makes it abundantly clear that the services of the village functionaries such as washerman, barbers and tailors are denied to the christian dalits. Discrimination is identified at village wells, tanks, canals, embankments and the public distribution system. The dalits are the bonded slaves of the "Madigathanne - Okkulathanne" slave system. As a result of this system, the Dalits are forced to do traditional occupations such as slaughtering, grave digging and scavenging. The apathy of and the nexus between government officials, police and the political forces are highlighted.

The book has six parts or chapters besides bibliography and questionnaire, the last prepared by experts. The second part depicts the social conditions of christian dalits, and the economic and political conditions are dealt with in the third part. Special attention is given to Dalit women who are the "Dalit among the Dalits" and the fourth deals with the appalling religious



conditions of the christian dalits. The findings of this study are summed up succinctly in part six.

Among others, the study points out the social restrictions imposed on the christian dalits based on the traditional Hindu 'pure and pollution ideology' and the rampant and open practice of untouchability that makes one wonder whether they are a part of a modern and professedly democratic nation and whether the law and order agencies exist at all. (p.237) It also proves the well-known fact that the backward castes are anti-Brahminical as well as anti-Dalit (p.238). Besides, this study also details the attitude of the so-called upper caste Hindus and the so-called upper caste christians towards christians of dalit origin, the attitude of non (dalit) converts to dalit converts, the strengths and the liberative potential in the dalit community (p.248-9) the resources for their empowerment (p.249) solutions to their problems (p.250) and the urgent need for the church to act in this regard.

The book has several strengths; the positive stand of and the work done by the researcher, Dr. Godwin Shiri; constitution and commission findings quoted relevantly and in full; list of fool-proof tables, empirical study; well prepared questionnaires in the vernacular of the peo-

ple in the target areas: the specific problems faced by dalit women in the rural areas; it is significant because it attempts to understand people's own perceptions of their problems; identifying root causes of the oppression and possible ways and means of empowerment; selected readings, add strengths; it is the fruit/s of walking through the non-easily-accessible villages in sweltering heat for one year by three committed people; findings besides questionnaire, based also on consultations... congregational meetings, seminars, interview, discussion and observation; historical record of the missions brought to focus; use of archival research; and raising apt questions in interpreting the data collected. On the whole, this case study provides explosive material, startling revelations and thoroughly disturbing news. It confirms, among other things, Soosai's contention made to the Supreme Court. It will be an eye-opener to many. It seems to depict the reality as it is and hence apparently objective. The book arouses strong emotions, including a feeling of frustration and anger and one hopes the anguish of the researcher will be shared by all right thinking and intelligent people in the country.

Certain questions such as the one below crop up after reading the book:

a. Why did the researcher choose one area in A.P. and another in Karnataka? Are these the representatives cases? Why two areas in the same region were not considered and contrasted? Rationale adopted needs elaboration.

b. While the attempt made through this empirical study is to be commended, still one could raise the question, without prejudice to the researcher, whether this is the way the Dalits see themselves?

The researcher has obviously placed the Church in India, especially the C.S.I. in his debt by his laborious and painstaking effort. The CISRS contribution made to the Indian Church through the researcher needs to be appreciated.

It is a case addressed to the unrepentant conscience of the Brahminical forces in the country, the Judiciary and the Church at large.

It is certainly a book that deserves the attention of the thinking public.

**F.J. Balasundaram**

Godwin Shiri,  
*A South Indian Case Study*  
Bangalore :  
Asian Trading Corporation,  
1997, Pages 270.

## SETTING AN EXAMPLE

A troubled mother one day came to Gandhi along with her daughter and explained to him that her daughter was in the habit of eating far more sweet food than was good for her. Please, she asked, would Gandhi speak to the girl and persuade her to give up this harmful habit? Gandhi sat for a while in silence and then said:

'Bring your daughter back in three weeks' time, and then I will speak to her', She went away as she was told and then came back after three weeks. This time Gandhi quietly took the daughter aside and in a few simple words pointed out to her the harmful effects of indulging in sweet food; he urged her to abandon the habit. Thanking Gandhi for giv-

ing her daughter such good advice, the mother then said to him in a puzzled voice; 'Still, I would like to know, Gandhi-ji, why you did not just say these words to my daughter three weeks ago when I first brought her to you'. 'But', explained Gandhi in reply: 'Three weeks ago I myself was still addicted to eating sweet foods'.



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*We wish you all  
a Merry Christmas  
and  
a New Year filled with  
hope, joy and peace.*



